

LIFE
By Harold Carter

Esther had not seen Hyam for nearly a year, but his absence did not dull the tenderness of her memories. They had come over to America as children together in the same ship. Esther's father had started peddling, and Hyam's, who had a little capital, had opened a tiny store in the heart of the Ghetto.

"Some day," said Hyam's father graciously to his old friend, "our children shall marry. Esther, wilt thou take my son to be thy husband when thou art grown?"

The little girl, not knowing that the words were half jocular, agreed in solemn, childish fashion. However, fate dispenses as she pleases, and so it came to pass that both the fathers died without savings, and Esther, then 15, went to work in a big clothing store, while Hyam secured a job as an office boy.

Three years later, Esther, by the utmost sacrifice, had saved nearly \$500. Hyam heard of this and came to her.

"Esther, do you remember what our fathers agreed?" he said.

Esther nodded and smiled. She had always loved Hyam, but he did not suspect that the bargain he was to propose had anything romantic about it.

"Lend me your \$500, Esther, and save me \$200 a year," he said. "Then I can go through the dental college and have a profession. I shall soon become rich and I will marry you."

It was the sort of bargain common in the Ghetto. Esther trustfully drew out her savings and gave them to Hyam, who, overcome with gratitude, kissed her awkwardly for the first time. So Hyam went to college and Esther toiled in the shop. Whenever the other girls laughed at her as a miser she only smiled. She hugged her secret to her heart and went about singing.

Koch, the owner of the big store, was a widower. He had begun to look about him for a wife. He hated loneliness and he had no children. His eyes fell upon Esther. She attracted him immensely. He thought what a fine wife she would make for him; how neat and pretty she was. He began to show her little favors. He advanced her from the store to the office, for Esther was quick and had already picked up bookkeeping. One day he asked her to marry him.

Esther was in despair. Koch was worth \$50,000, and, as his wife, she



Spent an Hour Tearing Up All Hyam's Letters

would live a life of ease. Koch was a kind man, but there was one element lacking—she did not love him.

Hyam was in his third year. If she refused Koch he would probably discharge her and that meant the end of all Hyam's hopes. She dissimulated. She told Koch she was too young to know her own mind and asked him to wait until the end of the year. Koch, pleased at the girl's